AIMS For a better birth...

Positive hospital birth during Covid-19

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By Lois Hubbard

My pregnancy journey had been uncomplicated and low risk all the way through and as it was my 3rd baby I really wanted to have a home birth which was nice and relaxed with my family around me. This was all arranged and we purchased a pool. I was really excited and looking forward to welcoming our little girl at home.

I'd had a couple of growth scans towards the end as my bump measurements were a bit off. These seemed to be ok so I was still on track for birthing at home until the Covid-19 pandemic hit.

Shortly afterward all home births in my area were cancelled. I was absolutely devastated by this news and spent a good few days crying and mourning the loss of the birth I had planned. Things were changing rapidly and talk of no birth partners and visitors in hospital was really concerning and I felt very vulnerable during this time. Anxiety, fear and anger took over and I felt robbed of all my choices and of the last few weeks of my pregnancy.

I finally pulled myself together with the help of my hypnobirthing teachers and techniques I had learnt on

the course, and refocused on planning for a birth at my local birthing centre. I felt I also had to plan for a labour ward birth as potentially the birth centre could close too. I was so glad I'd taken the course as it was a great source of support through this tough time.

I reached the 40 week mark and opted for a stretch & sweep, but this caused quite a bleed and my bump measurement had dropped again, so I ended up on the labour ward on my due date wondering whether I would need to be induced. I wanted to avoid induction if at all possible due to a previous experience being quite traumatic.

This was another tough time as my husband could not be with me in the hospital and after checkups on me and baby came back looking ok but indicating her growth had stopped, I was still feeling pressured into taking the induction. I found the confidence to push back and go with my instincts, so I agreed to return the next day for monitoring.

Again I was pushed to take the induction but my contractions had started up so, after a scan which showed more positive measurements, I returned home to let nature do its thing.

I had a great afternoon at home walking and relaxing while my contractions built steadily. By midnight they were getting less manageable so we headed into hospital. I was checked on arrival and was already 6cm dilated so my husband was allowed in with me. The doctor had recommended I be monitored continually because of the bleed I'd had, so this meant labour ward was my only option. I was really disappointed at this as the birth centre looked so nice and would've been closer to the home birth experience we planned.

Luckily we had a brilliant midwife who understood immediately how I felt and fought to get us up to the birth centre as long as baby was coping ok with labour. So after a short period of monitoring all looked good and we got moved to a lovely room with a pool all ready for us.

I got straight in the pool and stayed there for the rest of my labour. Using hypnobirthing and gas & air I coped with the contractions well and I felt in control throughout. In between them we chatted to our midwife and put the world to rights. I couldn't believe I was actually really enjoying my labour!

After around 4 1/2 hours I was fully dilated and feeling pressure to start pushing. This coincided with a shift change of midwives but our lovely midwife chose to work late and be with us till the end, which shows just how dedicated the staff can be.

I was encouraged throughout to listen to my body and follow the cues to push and our beautiful baby girl was born in the water at 7:22am still intact in her amniotic sac! Apparently this is a rare occurrence and considered very lucky. Her membranes were broken and she was brought straight up to me for skin to skin. I felt like Superwoman at this point and I was over the moon to have had the relaxed, hands off birth I always wanted. After a rollercoaster of emotions in the last few weeks I couldn't have asked for a better, more empowering and positive birth.

After a few hours resting and establishing breastfeeding we had all our checks and were off home to introduce our new daughter to her big sisters!

Huge thanks to the staff at Northampton General Hospital and The Barratt Birth centre for going above and beyond and listening to us to provide the best experience possible. And huge thanks to my amazing hypnobirthing course and all the support and guidance that came with it.

My labour and birth were the incredible experience that I thought I'd never achieve during the pandemic and I will treasure that forever.